

## Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-02 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-15 MCT-01

OMB-01 /069 W

-----231409 011399 /43

R 222023Z FEB 77

FM AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2295

UNCLAS BRIDGETOWN 0411

E.O. 11652:N/A

TAGS: AC PGOV PINT PORS

SUBJ: ANTIGUA GOVERNMENT ARRESTS OPPOSITION LEADERS ON FRAUD  
CHARGES

1. AS THE FIRST DRAMATIC RESULT OF ITS INVESTIGATION INTO ALLEGED CORRUPTION IN THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT, THE ANTIGUA LABOR PARTY GOVT ORDERED THE ARREST OF FORMER PREMIER GEORGE WALTER, FORMER FINANCE MINISTER SYDNEY PRINCE, AND FORMER CHAIRMAN OF THE PUBLIC UTILITIES AUTHORITY, DONALD HALSTEAD. WALTER AND PRINCE WERE CHARGED IN A MAGISTRATE COURT WITH CONSPIRACY TO DEFRAUD THE ANTIGUA GOVT OF REVENUE AND WERE EACH RELEASED ON EC \$5,000 BAIL. HALSTEAD WAS CHARGED WITH DEFRAUDING THE PUBLIC UTILITIES AUTHORITY OF APPROX EC \$12,500 AND WAS RELEASED ON EC \$10,000 BAIL.

2. IN CONVERSATION WITH EMBASSY OFFICIALS, MINISTER OF FINANCE REUBEN HARRIS CLAIMED THAT THE ARRESTS WERE NOT POLITICALLY MOTIVATED, BUT WERE NECESSITATED BY A LARGE AMOUNT OF EVIDENCE SUBSTANTIATING THE CHARGES. FURTHERMORE, HE SAID MORE ARRESTS WOULD FOLLOW, OF THE THREE ALREADY ARRESTED AND RELEASED, AND OF OTHERS. SEVERAL CIVIL SERVANTS WERE ALSO IMPLICATED IN THE INVESTIGATION COMMITTEE REPORT, BUT THEY WILL REPORTEDLY BE DISMISSED RATHER THAN FORMALLY CHARGED. ACCORDING TO HARRIS, HALSTEAD HAS 10 CHARGES ALREADY  
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AGAINST HIM, WALTER HAS 6 AND PRINCE HAS 3.

3. THE OPPOSITION ANTIGUA WORKERS' UNION RESPONDED TO THE ARRESTS WITH A FLAMBOYANT AND DRAMATIC SHOW OF SUPPORT FOR THEIR "POLITICALLY HARASSED" LEADERS. WHEN THE THREE MEN WERE RELEASED ON BAIL THEY WERE GREATED OUTSIDE THE COURT BY LOUD CHEERS FROM THEIR SUPPORTERS WHO BROKE THE POLICE CORDON TO

EMBRACE THEIR LEADERS. FORMER PREMIER WALTER THEN LED A PARADE THROUGH THE STREETS OF ST. JOHN'S TO "FREEDOM HALL", THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE ANTIGUA WORKERS' UNION. POLICE WEARING RIOT HELMETS WERE PRESENT AT THE COURT BUILDING AND ALONG THE IMPROMPTU PARADE ROUTE. A RADIO BROADCAST NEWS REPORT THAT THE CROWD HAD BEEN DISPERSED WITH TEARGAS WAS LATER DENIED BY BOTH THE PERMANENT SECRETARY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND THE MINISTER OF FINANCE. NO FURTHER REPORTS OF VIOLENCE OR FORCIBLE CROWD DISPERSION HAVE BEEN RECEIVED. THE EMBASSY HAS BEEN ASSURED THAT NO AMERICAN CITIZENS WERE INVOLVED IN ANY OF THE INCIDENTS.

4. WALTER'S REACTION TO THE ARRESTS WAS THAT THEY HAD BEEN EXPECTED, THAT THEY WERE "POLITICAL ARRESTS" AND THAT HE AND HIS FOLLOWERS WOULD ACQUIESCE TO DUE PROCESS.  
BRITTON

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NNN

## Message Attributes

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**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
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**TAGS:** PGOV, PINT, PORS, AC, (WALTER, GEORGE)  
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